THE BIOGRAPHY OF THE GOLDEN CALF AND THE SEVENTY ELECT

Islamic Biographies - Volume 3

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Chapter 1: The Incident of the Golden Calf and the Seventy Elect

Selection and Preparation Command:

According to Imam Muhammad bin Ishaq, following the transgression involving the worship of the Golden Calf, Prophet Musa (AS) selected seventy righteous men from among the Bani Israel. He instructed them:

Prophet Musa (AS):

“Proceed to Allah to seek forgiveness for your sins and for those of the Israelites who remained behind. For this purpose, observe fasting, perform ablution, and dress in pure, fine garments.”

The Seventy Elect complied with his instructions and gathered before Prophet Musa (AS). At the appointed divine time, the Seventy Elect ascended Mount Sinai.

A Demand for Audible Revelation:

Upon reaching Mount Sinai, the Seventy Elect made a collective request:

The Seventy Elect:

“Ask your Allah during your communion to allow us to hear His words directly. We desire to listen to His speech ourselves.”

Prophet Musa (AS):

“Very well.”

Divine Communication and the Israelites' Demand:

As the divine encounter commenced, a thick cloud enveloped the mountain. Prophet Musa (AS) entered the cloud and called the Seventy Elect forward:

Prophet Musa (AS):

“Draw nearer.”

A radiant light emanated from the forehead of Prophet Musa (AS) during his communion with Allah—so intense that none could bear to gaze upon it. A veil was drawn around him. When the Seventy Elect approached and entered the cloud, they fell into prostration and heard divine commandments—orders to “do this” and prohibitions to “refrain from that.” However, upon conclusion of the divine address.

Defiance and a Blasphemous Demand:

The Seventy Elect:

“O Musa! We shall never believe you merely on your word unless we see Allah openly with our own eyes.”

The Lightning Punishment and Revival:

At this, Allah decreed a severe punishment:

“A bolt of lightning struck you as you looked on. Then, We revived you after your death so that you might be grateful.”

All seventy of the Seventy Elect perished instantly. Distressed, Prophet Musa (AS) pleaded before Allah:

Prophet Musa (AS):

“O Allah! What shall I tell the Bani Israel? Surely, they will accuse me of having brought these men to their deaths.”

After remaining lifeless for a full day and night, each member of the Seventy Elect was miraculously resurrected, bearing witness to one another’s revival.

Longevity and Varied Interpretations:

The Seventy Elect lived long thereafter. Their identities are interpreted differently across historical traditions:

1. Followers of Prophet Harun (AS):

Those who abstained from idolatry but failed to prevent it.

2. Former Calf-Worshippers:

Those who had participated in the Golden Calf's worship and were chosen to represent their people in seeking divine pardon.

To clarify, Allah revealed to Prophet Musa (AS):

"These men were indeed among the participants in the calf's worship."

Reasons for the Divine Punishment:

Their punishment was necessitated by six grave transgressions:

1. Disrespectful Address:

The Seventy Elect addressed Prophet Musa (AS) without proper reverence due to a messenger of Allah.

2. Presumption of Divine Vision:

The Seventy Elect demanded to see Allah’s Essence—an impossibility for any mortal in this life.

3. Rejection of Prophetic Authority:

Their refusal to accept Prophet Musa's (AS) report signified blasphemous distrust.

4. Defiant Tone:

Their request was made arrogantly, devoid of humility or awe.

5. Pride in Status:

They presumed their closeness to Allah entitled them to extraordinary privilege.

6. Idolatrous Parallel:

Their insistence mirrored the earlier demand for a tangible deity, akin to the sin of the Golden Calf.

This punishment aligned with the Israelite principle of expiation through death. True and eternal vision of Allah remains reserved exclusively as the supreme reward for the righteous in Paradise.